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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 7, 2021
3rd Sunday in Lent

Scripture Lessons: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25,
Passion Lesson: Jesus before the Sanhedrin
Hymns: 390; 142:1-3; 367:1,2,4; 37:3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: John 2:13-22

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. ¹⁵When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" ¹⁷Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

¹⁸So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

¹⁹Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

²⁰Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

²¹But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²²Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Bookend events in the ministry of Christ.

That is what Jesus cleansing the temple is. It is a pair of bookend events. You see the events recorded in our text took place only a few months after the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. However, we associate the cleansing of the temple most with the events of what we call Holy Week, those last few days before Jesus' capture, His sufferings and death on the cross.

It may be that many don't realize that this was something that Jesus did twice, and that the first temple cleansing by Jesus is significant not only to Jesus' public ministry, but also most pointedly to Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection. So it is that on this third Sunday in Lent we are going back three years to the first temple cleansing and receiving instruction from the Holy Spirit regarding the special significance of that earlier event for our assurance of salvation. We shall see that --

THEME: Jesus Cleansing the Temple Reveals:

I. The Authority of God's Law Enjoined by the Christ.

Let us first consider exactly what it was that Jesus encountered that called for such bold action by Christ. The Passover was the highest of the high festivals or feasts of the Jewish faith. While there were three feasts that required the adult male population to come to Jerusalem, the Passover was the one that maintained the strongest impact on the people. The others that were observed were the feasts of tabernacles in which the male population lived in shelters outside their home, as a reminder of the Lord's providential care during the Israelite 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, and Pentecost, or a spring harvest festival similar to our Thanksgiving. The Jews had added to that the tradition of the Feast of Dedication, which falls in December. It celebrated the Maccabees liberating the temple from the pagan idolatry of the Greek rulers and rededicating the temple to the worship of the true God.

Passover drew the largest crowds and had the most ceremonial requirements associated with it. Many pilgrims came from all of Galilee and Judea, and they were often accompanied by their wives and children. People remained in and around Jerusalem for the entire week of the festival of unleavened bread. Indeed, many traveled from distant lands and would remain not only for Passover but then stay to observe Pentecost 50 days later. One can well understand that it was a time when a great deal of commerce would be happening in the Jerusalem environs, and especially centered in activity around the temple. Many pilgrims would plan to make other “catch-up” sacrifices and offerings they hadn’t made because of distance. It all required a great many sheep and lambs, and doves or pigeons, even some oxen, and Jewish money, in place of Roman currency which was deemed unacceptable for use with temple offerings. Like I said, a great deal of commerce was associated particularly with the Passover observance. The streets and surrounding countryside were filled with people providing the animals, proper currency and other goods people needed for their Passover observance.

The Jewish historian Josephus reports that the previous High Priest, Annas, the one we read about in our Passion reading this morning, set up his sons to manage this business in the temple courts so that his family might have the greatest of advantages in this commercial endeavor. They weren’t outside of the temple as other vendors, but inside the area designated as a place of prayer for gentile believers. This is what Jesus’ encountered, and what Jesus as the Christ found offensive to true worship of God.

Now to be sure this wasn’t the first time Jesus would have encountered this travesty. Remember Jesus first visit to the temple after infancy was as a twelve-year-old boy. While the abuses may not have dated back that far, they very likely started before the events recorded in our text. Jesus would have visited the temple all those many other Passovers from the time He was twelve until this one following His 30th birthday.

Why then did He wait until that particular Passover for the first temple cleansing? In accordance with Mosaic Ceremonial Law, it was not until Jesus had passed His 30th birthday that He initiated His public ministry. This action was a bold statement from **the**

Lord's Christ concerning the scandalous behavior transpiring in the temple courts!

The business advantage for those vendors granted a place in the temple courts was tremendous. Thousands and thousands of pilgrims would be buying lambs, as well as many other animals for sacrifices. While the Passover meal would be prepared at the home or inn, or camp where the pilgrims were staying, the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed at the altar by a priest on one of the few days preceding the Passover feast. So also, all the other sacrifices people offered the Lord. There was also the temple tax to be paid for continuing maintenance of the temple, and tithes to be paid, all in Jewish coin, not Roman.

It was all happening in the outer temple court, where only the gentile converts prayed. Imagine the filth made by hundreds of sheep and a good many bullocks and hundreds of birds. Imagine the cacophony of animal noise and the clamor of people bartering, and the smell. It was hardly conducive to quiet prayer and meditation, which was the Lord's intent for the festival of Passover. Instead of focusing on the significance of the Passover lamb whose shed blood represented the blood of the Messiah that would save the people from their sins, it was all commerce and seeing who could make the best deal. It was an affront to the true worship of God!

The Christ of God entered the scene. I repeat for emphasis, as Jesus walked into the temple courts, it was **THE CHRIST OF GOD** who set things right in the temple courts. Jesus fashioned a whip from the loose animal cords lying all about, and the sheep and oxen were driven out of the temple. The currency exchange tables were overturned. The dealers of doves and pigeons were ordered to remove themselves. No one could resist the authority behind Jesus' words and actions, for His was the authority of God and of His Christ! The temple courts reverted back from marketplace to house of prayer and meditation!

Some might point to Jesus' behavior as an outburst of anger, so let's settle that most clearly. Jesus was about His Father's business. Even as a twelve-year-old boy Jesus understood the role He was to fulfill as the Christ and was even then about His Father's business.

Now His public ministry had commenced, and it was time for all to see and understand that Jesus was the Christ, and that as the Christ He was about His Father's business. That was most certainly the case as Jesus entered the temple courts meant for prayer and cleared out the filth and sinful conduct of commerce. Anger? How about understanding this as **righteous indignation**. Jesus was operating according to God's law and seeing to it that those who were coming to the temple to worship could do so in peace!

This did incite a response beyond the merchants vacating the temple. The first response noted by our text is in the hearts and minds of Jesus' disciples, the second from the Jews who saw their authority being challenged, and their merchandizing of the Passover being upset.

John 2:17-18 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

¹⁸ So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

Surely it was the Holy Spirit that brought the words of King David's psalm to the disciples' mind as it applied to Jesus as the Christ. Yes, they saw how zeal for the Lord's House had taken charge and was plainly evident in Jesus' righteous actions.

What of the other response of the Jewish authorities? Well, that leads us to another significant truth concerning the Christ being revealed in connection with this **first** temple cleansing **three years** before Jesus' sufferings and death. Jesus presents –

II. The Power of a Crucified and Risen Christ Authenticating Scripture.

Did you catch the request for a sign in the challenge of the Jewish authorities? They wanted Jesus to perform a miraculous sign to demonstrate that He possessed the authority to clean out the temple courts. It calls to mind the words of our epistle lesson this morning, doesn't it? "*For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who*

are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

Jesus’ response to this challenge is incredibly significant, indeed it’s the reason we are focusing on this first cleansing of the temple instead of the second three years later, the Passover of Jesus’ crucifixion. It was three years before His death that Jesus presented the Jews with the sign, “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**” (v.19) John explains that while the Jews referred Jesus’ comments to the temple building and recited the long renovation project it had undergone under Herod the Great, Jesus was in fact talking about the temple of His body. Despite their words, the Jews understood these words and remembered them. In our Passion History reading this morning we read how, for the mock trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the false witnesses brought up these words of Jesus in their testimony against Him. But they couldn’t get it right so they could condemn Him.

While the disciples didn’t catch the true meaning of these words, the chief priests **did!** These words of our Lord, spoken three years before His crucifixion were the basis of their request to Pilate for sealing of Jesus’ tomb, and a Roman guard being placed there until the three days had expired.

Jesus’ words were words of prophecy that conveyed the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior. This truth lies at the heart of our faith, at the heart of our Lenten meditation. Jesus came to earth to suffer and die for us to take away our sins and deliver us from death. This would happen at the hands of the chief priests, and it would happen right at the high point of the Passover. Jesus was the true Passover Lamb provided by God, whose blood painted upon the posts of the cross would deliver us from death, and from all condemnation. Jesus willingly gave Himself into death as the sacrifice for our sin. They destroyed the temple of His body when they crucified Him, and in three days Jesus raised it up again. The sign of Jesus’ authority was presented to Jews first in prophetic word, and then in fulfillment of that word. **They knew it!** They knew it, but they had no faith that they might have salvation in Jesus’ name.

*“Paschal Lamb, by God appointed, All our sins on Thee were laid;
By almighty love anointed, Thou hast full atonement made.*

*Ev'ry sin may be forgiven Thro' the virtue of Thy blood;
Open is the gate of heaven; Peace is made 'twist man and God."*
(The Lutheran Hymnal 367:2)

What about the disciples? What did they think of these words declaring this bold sign Jesus would perform? Well, it seems that at the time they didn't know what to make of them. Remember the disciples, partly because of their affection for Jesus as a close companion, were blinded to the truth of Jesus needing to die for us and our salvation. Because of this they missed so much that Jesus taught them during that three year's of instruction they had received from Him. But all was not lost. Our text reports : "*When He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they **believed** the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*" (v.22)

The Spirit brought these words and so many more to their remembrance, first for their instruction in righteousness, and secondly that they might by inspired guidance of the Holy Spirit. record and convey the gospel truth to us in our day. The disciples did then finally understand that Jesus' authority was the authority of God, and that as the Christ of God He brought the Word of truth to this sinful world.

We also possess the same certainty of faith. Jesus' words are true, and Jesus' words are life. What is clearly demonstrated by Jesus cleansing of the temple courts is the power of a Crucified Savior to bring life and salvation to a fallen world, and bring us into the courts of God's temple that we might glorify Him and praise our Father for all eternity!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.